

## Formation of the State of Bhutan ('Brug gzhung) in the 17th Century and its Tibetan Antecedents\*

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### Introduction

The relationship between religion and the state has remained a perennial issue of the Tibetan cultural presence since the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The question is how the definition and actuality of that relationship evolved over fourteen centuries, both theoretically and in the practical implementation of governing structures. On what moral or normative religious grounds have the various Tibetan governments justified their existence? Conversely, what political assertions or compromises have religious institutions made to achieve a privileged, or at least defined and workable, relationship with the entities of civil governance?

These are questions that in India and the West were framed in the context of debate over political theory, by such authors as Kautilya, Plato, Machiavelli, Montesquieu, Locke and a host of others. In the Buddhism-dominated intellectual universe of traditional Tibet, debates over politics and government were more likely to be argued in the pages of religious or quasi-religious tracts. Biography, poetry and religious history were literary genres which Tibetans used to expound views on government, often linking important events and leaders of the present with archetypes, both good and evil, from canonical antiquity and the early monarchy.<sup>i</sup> Prophecy (including recovered *gter-ma* works and dream encounters with deceased saints) was an especially potent Tibetan cultural medium in which political criticism of contemporary rulers could be articulated as an "authoritative voice from the past." In the extreme were certain itinerant prophets who, like

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their Biblical counterparts, sometimes described their visions in voices deemed too politically strident, becoming thereby the targets of imprisonment or assassination.<sup>ii</sup>

Although the phrase ‘union of religion and state’ *chos srid zung ’brel* was widely invoked as an abstract theory of governance in Tibet, its actual implementation varied considerably.<sup>iii</sup> During the 17-year period 1625-42, three governments were formed in Tibetan cultural regions of the Himalayas that endured into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, each with a distinctive religion-state basis. We refer to the *dGa’ldan Pho-brang* government of the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama (1642), the state of Sikkim or *’Bras-ljongs* (1642), and the state of Bhutan (1625/26) later called *’Brug-gzhung Phyogs-las-rnam-rgyal*. In the case of Bhutan, some fifty years after its founding in 1625/26 an elaborate theoretical justification of the state’s mission was written, describing it as an earthly realm founded by the *Zhabs-drung Rin-po-che* Ngag-dbang rNam-rgyal (1594-1651), an emanation of the *Bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara, to rule for the welfare and ultimate salvation of his citizens in The Southern Land of Medicinal Plants.<sup>iv</sup> Eighteen years later the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama’s regent, *sDe-srid* Sangs-rgyas rGya-mtsho, published a similar manifesto on behalf of the government in Lhasa.<sup>v</sup> Each claimed to have inherited the mandate and *chos srid zung ’brel* mission of the Sakya - Mongol government. By contrast, no such exalted claims were made on behalf of the Chogyal of Sikkim, whose small Nyingmapa kingdom became a territory of competition between Bhutan and Tibet.

It is easy to overlook the influence that more than a century of militancy between Bhutan and Tibet had on broader events of the period 1616 to roughly 1736. It is our contention that the two documents cited above were written and published as essentially political statements, articulated in the language of intellectual debate current in the greater Tibetan world, at a time when Bhutan and Tibet were competing for influence throughout the Himalayas. They were not intended as unvarnished biography or history, but rather provided a

framework of canonical and prophetic *Buddha-vacana*, words of the Buddha on which to interpret and justify the political events taking place on the ground.<sup>vi</sup> Yet, there is a more complex story here. For how could two neighboring states sharing the same scriptural etiology and constitutional intent, whose heads of state were emanations of the same bodhisattva, yet remain at war with one another for more than one hundred years over such issues as boundary alignments, control of trade routes, and the ownership of statues?

### **The Historical Origin of the State of Bhutan**

The founding of a centralized state in Bhutan was the outcome of an unresolved dispute between competing candidates for recognition as head of the 'Brug-pa sect in Tibet. But at another level it was also a dispute over competing theories of government. From the time of gTsang-pa rGya-ras (1161-1211) until the 14<sup>th</sup> Ra-lung hierarch rGyal-dbang Kun-dga' dPal-'byor (1428-1476), the 'Brug-pa sect had been centered at 'Brug and Ra-lung monasteries under the control of a single family, a branch of the ancient rGya clan.<sup>vii</sup> Although Ra-lung was one of the major family religious establishments (*gdan-sa*) in central Tibet, at one time granted the control of some 1,900 tax-paying estates by the emperor Yesün Temür, it never achieved the formal status of a myriarchy (*khri-skor*) within the Mongol classification, and much of its erstwhile political authority fell away by 1360, allegedly out of the abbots' disinterest in secular affairs.<sup>viii</sup>

In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, however, the sect was split in two by a great court dispute that in today's terms could be called a 'constitutional question': "Who had the mandate to provide continued leadership of the sect and control its material patrimony, the descendants of gTsang-pa rGya-ras or his reincarnations?" The first such reincarnation, called *rGyal-dbang 'Brug-chen*, was Kun-dga' dPal-'byor (1428-1476), a scion of the rGya hierarchs of Ra-lung. But the next two rebirths 'Jam-dbyangs Chos-kyi-grags-pa (1478-1523) and Padma-dkar-po (1527-1592) did not belong to the rGya family,

which declined to invest either of them with control of 'Brug or Ra-lung monasteries. The two candidates for recognition as the rebirth of Padma-dkar-po were *Zhabs-drung* Ngag-dbang rNam-rgyal (1594-1651), a scion of the family who had already been installed as Ra-lung hierarch, and dPag-bsam dBang-po (1593-1641) who was a bastard son of the powerful 'Phyongs-rgyas myriarch. After several years of low-level skirmishing, the dispute came to a head over possession of the so-called "self-created" (*rang-byon*) Kharsapāni image of Avalokiteśvara said to have emerged miraculously from the cremated remains of gTsang-pa rGya-ras. The entire 'Brug-pa community believed in the prophetic power of this image, which had been used to certify Padma-dkar-po's status as the legitimate rebirth of 'Jam-dbyangs Chos-kyi-grags-pa and was expected to identify his successor.<sup>ix</sup>

The whole matter was brought before the court of the regional strongman at bSam-grub-rtse, gTsang *sDe-srid* bsTan-brungs-pa (d.1611?) and his successor Phun-tshogs rNam-rgyal (1597-1621?). Both seem to have been offended by the *Zhabs-drung*'s brusque behavior, and were heavily lobbied by supporters of his opponent led by his tutor *Lha-rtse-ba* Ngag-dbang bZang-po (1546-1615). When the court required the *Zhabs-drung* to surrender the image he refused to do so, out of family pride and certain that it would be used in a politically contrived stunt to reject his position. In 1616 he decided to take refuge with his patrons in what is now the state of Bhutan, bringing the prophetic image with him.<sup>x</sup>

### **The Founding of the State of Bhutan**

Before the 17<sup>th</sup> century, western Bhutan consisted of a small number of agricultural communities, basically independent of any higher civil authority but given to ever-changing factional alliances and feuds over various issues, including sectarian allegiance. With some variation, the social patterns were similar in central and eastern Bhutan. However the predominant religion there was Nyingmapa Buddhism, with the exception of Merak in the far east which was allied to the Gelugpa monasteries of Tibet. The 'Brug-pa were predominant

in western Bhutan, where more than a dozen branch monasteries of Ra-lung predated 1600, and strong marital alliances between the rGya family of Ra-lung and local valley chiefs had been forged during the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>xi</sup>

From his new headquarters, the *Zhabs-drung* exchanged a series of highly challenging letters with the young *Sde-pa Gtsang-pa* Phun-tshogs rNam-rgyal, denouncing his enemies and their claim to the sacred image.<sup>xii</sup> In what must be one of the most openly aired cases of monastic infighting over a contested rebirth, he laid out a detailed account of his opponents' alleged forgery, sectarian corruption, threats, bribery and nepotism. Then, in a tone of conciliation, he offered to terminate the black magic rites he had been aiming at the gTsang court since the time of the former *sDe-pa* bsTan-bsrungs-pa, if the two men could now come to a mutual agreement. But this did not happen. Instead, in 1618 Phun-tshogs rNam-rgyal launched an army into Bhutan. However, the *Zhabs-drung* won this battle by relying upon sorcery and the support of Bhutanese village militias. With this victory and several later ones over combined Tibetan and Mongol forces, the *Zhabs-drung* established his reputation among the local chiefs and in Tibet as a tough-minded leader and powerful *magus* (*mthu-chen*) able to rouse the local deities to his defense.<sup>xiii</sup>

The *Zhabs-drung*'s original intent, the evidence suggests, was to win his court case and return to Tibet. But by 1623, with the dispute still unresolved, an alternate plan was needed. The *Zhabs-drung* entered a three-year retreat to consider his future, in a cave north of Thimphu.<sup>xiv</sup> As he later explained to attendants, one option was to follow the path of such former saints as Mi-la-ras-pa and Lo-ras-pa, wandering and meditating in obscurity as lonely mountain hermits. The second was to follow the path taken by the Sakya hierarch 'Phags-pa to found a new religious state.<sup>xv</sup> Prophetic guidance from the sacred image of Avalokiteśvara and dream encounters with his deceased father bsTan-pa'i-nyi-ma both convinced him that he should found a new religious state

ruled according to the Tibetan tradition of uniting religion and secular government in a single administrative apparatus, the so-called 'two-fold system' (*lugs gnyis*). During the eleventh month of the Wood-Ox year (1625/26), he emerged from the cave and announced his decision to establish a new government in the country then known as "Southern Mon Land of Four Doors" (*Lho-Mon Kha-bzhi*).<sup>xvi</sup>

### The Theoretical Foundations of the 'Brug-pa State

The governing structures of the Bhutan state seem to have evolved gradually out of precedents at hand and the temporary arrangements of the *Zhabs-drung* and his small entourage. Initially, it was perhaps something of a clone of the situation at Ra-lung, i.e. a monastic *gdan-sa* with a few officials and a network of patrons and properties. Other than personal attendants and his Tibetan teacher Lha-dbang Blo-gros, whom he appointed to serve as chief monastic preceptor, the principal officer known for certain to have been appointed by the *Zhabs-drung* was his Bhutanese patron bsTan-'dzin 'Brug-rgyas (1591-1656), who was delegated the responsibilities of civil administration.<sup>xvii</sup> We shall say more about this office in a moment. For several years the *Zhabs-drung* operated out of small, pre-existing monasteries at Cheri, Tango, and Pangri Zampa<sup>xviii</sup>, all located just north of the present capital, Thimphu. It required about twenty-five years to construct major fortified monasteries at Paro Rinchenpung, Wangdue Phodrang, Trongsa, Punakha, and Tashichhodzong. The theoretical foundations of the *Zhabs-drung's* new ecclesiastic state are presented in elaborate detail by his biographer, gTsang mKhan-chen, himself a refugee Karma-pa monk driven out of Tibet by Mongol troops loyal to the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama.<sup>xix</sup> We have said that this work was a political document, to the extent that its purpose was to justify his subject's state-building mission and political position with respect to Tibet. The archetypes of legitimate governance from which the author drew were those that were accepted more or less implicitly by the Tibetan intelligentsia, namely Buddhist canonical and *gter-ma* precedents embedded within received scripture, the hallowed kings of the early Tibetan monarchy,

and the more recent example of the Sakya-Mongol alliance. These sources provided a vocabulary of religious purpose and governing process that could be combined, as needed, to describe a variety of actual state entities. It is instructive to see how they were differently interpreted in the case of Bhutan and the *dGa'-ldan Pho-brang* government at Lhasa.

The precedents and arguments cited by gTsang mKhan-chen to justify the *Zhabs-drung's* state-building initiative can be grouped into three categories, all deriving from the context of Buddhism.

### 1. Legitimacy through Prophecy, Sorcery, and Karma

In gTsang mKhan-chen's analysis, every significant event in the life of the *Zhabs-drung Rin-po-che* had been foretold in prophecy or pre-ordained through the workings of karma. The fruition of these prophecies was offered as proof of his incarnate status. For example, his flight from Tibet to Bhutan was interpreted as the fulfillment of several prophecies, including one of Padma Sambhava:

Seek out repose in the Southern Valleys,  
On the border, through the Southern Door;  
If you do thus you will gain as much success in seven days of  
meditation as in seven years in the land of Tibet.<sup>xx</sup>

Other prophecies attributed to gTsang-pa rGya-ras were interpreted as pointing to a reincarnate successor occurring within the family line. But the *Zhabs-drung's* enemies opposed this reasoning, pointing to the fact that the last two incarnates had been recognized outside the family.<sup>xxi</sup> The *Zhabs-drung* then escalated his offensive, employing black magical rites for which he had a growing reputation. He prophesied the death in 1641 of his Tibetan rival dPag-bsam dBang-po whom he branded "the false incarnation." Gtsang mKhan-chen suggests that his use of sorcery had caused it.<sup>xxii</sup> Earlier enemies who fell victim to his reputed magical powers included the 'Phyongs-rgyas myriarch Ngag-dbang bSod-nams Grags-pa, murdered in 1615 by a crazed Indian

yogin, and the ruler of gTsang Phun-tshogs rNam-rgyal and his wife who both died c.1621 of smallpox blamed on the *Zhabs-drung*.<sup>xxiii</sup>

The death of his rivals and continued victories over invading Tibetan armies were interpreted by gTsang mKhan-chen as the fruition of karma and the fulfillment of prophecies that an emanation of Avalokiteśvara should establish a new state for the welfare of its sentient inhabitants.<sup>xxiv</sup> In the *Baidūrya-ser-po*, *Sde-srid* Sangs-rgyas rGya-mtsho made similar use of prophecy and *gter-ma* texts recorded by such writers as Nyang-ral, to define an identical mission for the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama in Lhasa. These were potent arguments that resonated with Tibetan cultural norms, and were widely resorted to in historical works of that era.<sup>xxv</sup>

## 2. Scriptural Authority and Personality: The Bodhisattva as Dharmaraja

Although the *Zhabs-drung Rin-po-che*'s government was claimed to be modeled upon that of Sakya,<sup>xxvi</sup> in fact there were significant differences in the actual organization. An important difference was that the *Zhabs-drung* was an independent entity. Unlike the figurehead Imperial Preceptor or *Di Shi* of Sakya, his spiritual rule did not depend on an external Mongol protector.<sup>xxvii</sup> No military strongman granted him authority in Bhutan in the way that the Mongol Gushri Khan did for the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama. Nor did the Chinese emperor play-act a "lama-patron" role in the guise of Mañjuśrī as happened in Qing Dynasty Tibet.<sup>xxviii</sup> Bhutanese support for the *Zhabs-drung* accrued gradually during his lifetime, in part by willing patronage and in part by conquest and the expulsion of rival Lamas.<sup>xxix</sup>

In gTsang mKhan-chen's interpretation, therefore, the head of state in Bhutan was himself simultaneously a Bodhisattva and a Dharmarāja, the embodiment of a militant Avalokiteśvara taking command as its chief of state, Lokeśvara (*'Jig-rten mgon-po*), in a world polluted by the "five defilements" (*snyigs-ma lnga*). Scriptural authority was cited



from texts in the Kanjur which interpreted the mission of Ngag-dbang rNam-rgyal as that of turning the ten-fold wheel of the Dharma in both a religious sense and as a Cakravartin, that is to say as a monarch inspired by religion.<sup>xxx</sup> In Tibetan governments, however, where civil and religious authority were more clearly separated, the archetypal role of Dharmarāja or *Chos-kyi-rgyal-po* was interpreted as being filled by the civil rulers. At Sakya this was the office of *dPon-chen*.<sup>xxxi</sup> For the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, Gushri Khan and his successors were specifically entitled *Chos-rgyal* of Tibet.

Thus, civil governance was a key difference. The *Zhabs-drung* answered to no higher authority, but chose to create a subordinate administrative position called *sDe-srid* (the so-called 'Deb Raja' of British Indian sources), which was originally quasi-monastic. The *Zhabs-drung* was clearly above the *sDe-srid* and his successors always had the theoretical (though seldom exercised) right to simultaneously fill both positions.<sup>xxxii</sup> The first Bhutanese *sDe-srid* had been a monk at Ra-lung, and came from an old and prominent Bhutanese family with ancient ties to Tibet. His role under the *Zhabs-drung* was to manage the civil responsibilities that began to grow in complexity after 1626, and to organize the war efforts against his Tibetan and local enemies. Owing to the termination of the *Zhabs-drung*'s family line and the fact that his death in 1651 was kept a secret for more than fifty years, however, the position of *sDe-srid* began a long evolutionary drift towards greater independence until, by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the notion of its subordination to the *Zhabs-drung* and his incarnate successors became thoroughly challenged.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Other differences between Sakya and Bhutan are explained by contrasting temperament of their founders. The mercurial, multi-faceted *Zhabs-drung Rin-po-che* demanded a bigger historical role than the scholarly Sakya Pandita or his compliant nephew 'Phags-pa. He was intolerant of Bhutanese who would not submit to his government, and many opponents were expelled from the country.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Unlike Sakya,

the launch of the state of Bhutan took place in a foreign land and in a state of war with both internal and external enemies. The resistance of sectarian rivals was interpreted by the *Zhabs-drung*'s apologists as proof of the need for an aggressive, forceful ruler. An obscure text from the Kanjur, the *Tantra on the Arising of the Wrathful Lord's Yogic Powers* provided the necessary archetype of a "hands-on" Bodhisattva who, in extreme circumstances, resorted even to the killing of enemies to make his earthly kingdom safe for the Dharma.<sup>xxxv</sup> In Tibet, where Gushri Khan served as defender of the faith, the Dalai Lama's persona did not require such a militant interpretation.

Nowhere is the issue of personality more succinctly highlighted than in two poems, whose stylistic origins have deep indigenous roots. Sakya Pandita was the author of a famous (some might say egotistical) verse called "Commentary on the Eight I's" (*nga brgyad-ma'i 'grel-pa*), which included the passages

I am a linguist, I a logician, I an unequalled destroyer of  
pernicious talk;

...

I have an unrivalled discerning intellect;  
Such a one is the man of Sakya, [I, Sakya Pandita], of whom  
other scholars are [mere] reflections.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

Four hundred years later, in clear imitation of this poem and with no pretence to humility, the *Zhabs-drung Rin-po-che* wrote a declaration of victory over the *Sde-pa gTsang-pa* Phun-tshogs rNam-rgyal known as "The Sixteen I's" (*nga bcu-drug-ma*):

I am he who turns the wheel of the dual system (of spiritual  
and secular law).

I am everyone's good refuge.

I am he who upholds the teachings of the Glorious 'Brug-pa.

I am the subduer of all who disguise themselves as 'Brug-pa

I achieve the realization of the Sarasvatī of Composition.

I am the pure source of moral aphorisms.  
 I am the possessor of an unlimited view.  
 I am he who refutes those with false views.  
 I am the possessor of great power in debate.  
 Who is the rival that does not tremble before me?  
 I am the hero who destroys the host of demons.  
 Who is the strong man that can repulse my power?  
 I am mighty in speech that expounds religion.  
 I am wise in all the sciences.  
 I am the incarnation prophesied by the patriarchs.  
 I am the executioner of false incarnations.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

Thus, the archetypes of Bodhisattva and Dharmarāja, of scholar and wrathful lord, could be adopted as needed, to underpin the reality of events taking shape in the physical world of human affairs.

### 3. The 'Social Contract' and Code of Laws

In every major Himalayan state where traditional Tibetan cultural values held sway, including Bhutan, it was the declared obligation of the civil head of state to maintain law and order so that its subjects could devote themselves to leading a moral life and strive for a better rebirth in the next. Various clichés were passed down to epitomize the workings of good government, such as “the ability of an old woman to safely carry a load of gold” through the realm.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Gtsang mKhan-chen neatly presented this interrelationship, summarizing canonical passages that might be called the Buddhist equivalent of a ‘Social Contract’:

The happiness of sentient beings is dependent on the teachings of the Buddha, whereas the teachings of the Buddha, too, are dependent on the happiness of the world....<sup>xxxix</sup>

From this theoretical interdependence and common purpose was interpreted the government’s right to administer civil law. In the ideal ‘two-fold system’, “religious laws are to be as firm as a soft silken knot, and civil laws as firm as a golden yoke.”<sup>xl</sup> In a similar formulation from Bhutan, the burden of government was to be “as firm as a golden yoke upon the

necks of citizens, whose households are countless as the stars in the sky.”<sup>xli</sup> Thus, in the highly conservative societies we are studying, benign yet firm minimalism was perceived as a government virtue, and this is reflected in the parsimony of their law codes. Since the time of Srong-btsan sGam-po, legal and moral principles were laid down in succinct groups of ten, thirteen, sixteen, or twenty-one “prescripts” (*zhal-lce bcu-drug*, etc.) which became the starting point for all later formulations such as the expanded administrative law codes of later centuries.<sup>xlii</sup> Thus in Bhutan, the civil law code as we know it from the version published in the *Lho’i chos’byung*, was a fairly complex document that included many detailed policies on taxation, trade, social affairs, and prescribed behavior for the administrative class.<sup>xliii</sup>

### The Founding of the Sikkim Kingdom

A few words need to be said about Sikkim. This small country had been known for centuries in Tibetan writings as a Hidden Land of Padma Sambhava, the Valley of Rice (*’Bras ljongs*). In 1642, the same year as the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama’s installation in Tibet, the first Chogyal of Sikkim named Phun-tshogs-rnam-rgyal got himself installed at Yuksam Nor-bu-sgang, thereby founding a hereditary princely line of Tibetan ancestry.<sup>xliv</sup> The original territories were not very extensive, and power had to be shared with the heads of native Lepcha and Bhutia families who supplied ministers and consorts to the royal court. The three Tibetan Lamas who conducted his enthronement ceremony were all Nyingmapa, and like gTsang mKhan-chen are said to have fled from Tibet to escape Mongol depredations.<sup>xlv</sup>

Unlike Bhutan, however, although the Sikkim state was ruled under the *Chos srid zung ’brel* principle and the Chogyal of Sikkim was treated as a local Dharmarāja and reincarnation, he made no grand claim to fulfilling the legacy of Sakya, or to being an emanation of Avalokiteśvara on a par with the Dalai Lamas of Tibet. Instead, both rulers were initiates and disciples of the Tibetan Nyingmapa Lama gTer-bdag Gling-pa, founder of sMin-grol-gling monastery in Tibet, and of Lha-

btsun Nam-mkha'-jigs-med who performed the Chogyal's coronation. From these spiritual ties there arose a cordial relationship between the two governments which brought the Chogyal and his descendants as frequent visitors to the Potala. Although the Bhutanese tried several times to gain a permanent foothold in Sikkim, Sikkim became an acknowledged client state of Tibet by the early 18th century, which it remained even after the British established a Political Officer at Gangtok a century later.<sup>xlvi</sup> Thus, in spite of sharing in the common Tibetan heritage of scriptural precedent and political archetypes, the political form that *Chos srid zung 'brel* took in Sikkim's case was vastly different from the situation in Bhutan.

### Conclusions

In reviewing what has been written above, it appears evident that any description of the relationship between religion and state in traditional Tibet must take place at several levels. In the abstract, Tibetan historians and apologists adopted a common set of political models based on canonical sources and idealized interpretations of the early Tibetan monarchy. Although providing a kind of 'constitutional' basis and legitimacy, this level of description remains too abstract for real political analysis, and seems always to have been applied after the fact. Below this level, the principal structural differences between Bhutan, Sakya, and later Tibetan governments arose from historical events, an important differentiation being the nature of the power relationship between civil administrators and spiritual heads. Finally, as would be expected, individual personalities were critical in determining the shape and direction of the state-religion relationship.

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<sup>i</sup> One well-known example of such a polemic is the moralism that underlies the story of the destruction of the Tibetan empire in the 9<sup>th</sup> century by the “anti-Buddhist” king Glang Dar-ma. This story is only now getting the scrutiny it deserves as a political myth in the perennial Tibetan debate over the relationship between Buddhism and the state (see mKhar-rme’u 1986: 14-18; Z. Yamaguchi 1996 *passim*; Kapstein 2000: 10-12).

<sup>ii</sup> A prominent example is the Tibetan prophet-cum-‘treasure finder’ Rong-pa *gter-ston* U-rgyan bDud-’dul Gling-pa, who was captured and imprisoned by the Tibetan authorities c.1717 after a twelve-year exile in Bhutan, for his promulgation of prophecies from Padma Sambhava critical of the Tibetan Qoṣot overlord Lajan Khan (*LNDRM*: 168.b; Khetsun Sangpo, *Biographical Dictionary of Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 4: 339-47). Another famous *gter-ston* political critic was the Nyingmapa mystic from Khams named ’Brug-sgra rDo-rje, who is believed to have been assassinated in Bhutan c.1728 following his revelations from Padma Sambhava critical of the 8<sup>th</sup> Bhutanese *sDe-srid* named ’Brug Rab-rgyas (see Ardussi, forthcoming).

<sup>iii</sup> On the Tibetan concept of interrelated religion and state – *chos srid gnyis ldan* or *chos srid zung ’brel* – see Nirmal Singha (1968), Uray (1972), Phuntshog Wangyal (1975), Chab-spel Tshe-brtan Phuntshogs (1993) and Dung-dkar Blo-bzang ’Phrin-las (1982, 1991, 1997). The concept was formulated to describe the Sakya-Mongol central government, but its roots can be found in even older Tibetan sources conceptualizing about the early monarchy. For example, in one of the poems recorded by *Nyang-ral* Nyi-ma ’od-zer (late 12<sup>th</sup> century), king *Khri* Srong-lde-btsan encounters Padma Sambhava at Has-po-ri, and thinks to himself, “I am king of the earth spirits. I am lord of both royal laws and religious laws. Therefore, this Guru should pay obeisance to me” (*nga sa bdag rgyal po yin / rgyal khrims dang chos khrims gnyis kyi bdag po yin pas slob dpon gyis nga la phyag byed snyam /*.) But Padma Sambhava awes the king in a brilliant rejoinder based on a song of the *mgur* genre, arguing his superiority based on spiritual attainment, whereupon *Khri* Srong-lde-btsan enthrones and bows before him (*Nyang-ral Chos-’byung*: p. 283. I thank Heather Stoddard for bringing this passage to my attention). The theory’s application to the kings of gTsang is stated in the preface to the anonymous *Law Code of Karma bsTan-skyong dBang-po*, p.13: “He is ’Jam-dpal-dbyangs, protector of religion and the state; a wishing jewel to his subjects!’ Thus is lauded the King of Upper gTsang” (*chos srid skyong la ’jam dpal dbyangs / mnga’ ’bangs rnam la yid bzhi nor / mtshan smos gtsang stod*

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*rgyal po yin* /).

<sup>iv</sup> I refer to the biography (*LNDRR*) of *Zhabs-drung Rin-po-che* Ngag-dbang rNam-rgyal (1594-1651), written c.1675 by gTsang mKhan-chen 'Jam-dbyangs dPal-ldan rGya-mtsho, a Tibetan Karmapa scholar and refugee from the Mongol-led sectarian purges after 1642. I disagree with Michael Aris' interpretation of the prolixity of this work as being due purely to the idiosyncrasy of its author (Aris 1979: 203ff). The "complicated categories of Buddhist thought" adduced to describe the Zhabs-drung's activities, though taxing to the reader, were at the very core of the author's justification of his subject's political role, having one foot in the world of *srid* and one in that of *chos*.

<sup>v</sup> By this I mean chs. 22-23 of the *Baidūrya Ser-po*, completed in 1698. The effulgent style of this part of the work, its fascination for prophecies and panegyric tone in praise of the Dalai Lama-cum-Avalokiteśvara and his earthly fulfillment of the Buddha's twelve deeds, clearly reflect the style and content of the earlier work by gTsang mKhan-chen. (Vostrikov 1970: 174 notes the criticism leveled against the excesses of this part of the *Baidūrya Ser-po* by other, later Gelugpa historians).

<sup>vi</sup> In the *Baidūrya Ser-po*, the sDe-srid never acknowledges or responds directly to the written barbs launched against the Tibetan government in gTsang mKhan-chen's work. But both he and the Fifth Dalai Lama were intimately aware of events in Bhutan, and never lost an opportunity to celebrate a calamity occurring in the Bhutanese capital. It should be kept in mind that Sangs-rgyas rGya-mtsho was appointed sDe-srid only in 1679, replacing his predecessor Blo-bzang sByin-pa who was removed from office following a major defeat of Tibetan forces in Bhutan during the previous year, of which he was overall commander.

<sup>vii</sup> The background was first sketched out in E. Gene Smith (1968): 1-4. See also Aris 1979: 208ff and Ardussi 1997. Two other sects centered in gTsang were also founded by members of a rGya lineage: the 'Ba'-ra-ba and the gNas-rnying-pa (see Roerich, *Blue Annals*: 692f).

<sup>viii</sup> *LNDRR Nga*: 107.a; Padma-dkar-po, *Chos 'byung bstan pa'i padma rgyas pa'i nyin byed*: 304.a-b; but see Petech 1990: 58 fn.

<sup>ix</sup> Padma-dkar-po, *Sems dpa' chen po padma dkar po'i rnam thar thugs rje chen po'i zlos gar*, ff. 20.b-21.a (contained in his *Collected Works*, vol. 3). On the early history of this prophetic image, see Padma-dkar-po, *Gdan sa chen po ra lung gi khyad par 'phags pa cung zad brjod pa ngo mtshar gyi gter*, ff. 6.b-8.a (contained in his *Collected Works*, vol. 4). The Zhabs-drung's father had consulted the

image in private, years earlier, receiving confirmation of his own son as the rebirth. It was also claimed that the previous Ra-lung hierarch, Ngag-dbang Chos-rgyal had received a communication from the image specifically denying the validity of the 'Phyongs-rgyas candidate, whose supporters were now demanding a more public process (LNDRR Ga: 14.b-17.b; Nga: 103.a).

<sup>x</sup> The image became a sacred relic in Bhutan, still kept at the Punakha Dzong (Aris 1979: 209f). At some point Ra-lung monastery replaced this image with another *rang-byon* Kharsapa's image of its own, which was still on exhibit there during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (*Kah-thog Si-tu'i dBus gTsang gnas yig*: 271).

<sup>xi</sup> See Ardussi (2000).

<sup>xii</sup> LNDRR, Ca: 5.a-7.b. I am preparing a translation of these letters and related documents for a forthcoming publication.

<sup>xiii</sup> Of course, this assessment emerges most clearly from Bhutanese records. But there are numerous snippets in Tibetan sources that portray him as having a partisan and combative nature.

<sup>xiv</sup> The events of the retreat are detailed in LNDRR Nga: 52.b-61.b, 65.b-67.a; *Lho'i chos 'byung*: 29.b.

<sup>xv</sup> LNDRR Nga: 52.a-b: rim gro pa zhabs 'bring du gnas pa rnam la zur tsam re gsungs te da ni kho bo sngon mi la ras pa dang / lo ras kyis dka' ba spyad pa ltar / 'jig rten 'di'i g.yeng ba thams cad spangs nas / 'tsho ba bcud len dang dka' thub ras rkyang la brten / mi med lung stong gi ri khrod 'ba' zhig tu nges pa med par 'grims nas / 'brug pa gdung brgyud gang du bzhud / gang na bzhugs / mthong ba lta ci smos / thos pa'i mi yang mi 'dug / phal cher med pa 'dra zer ba dang / yang bar 'gar gangs brag 'di lta bu zhig na bzhugs pa mthong 'dug zer ba dang / gang na yang mi 'dug zer ba sogs / skye bo tha mal pa'i spyod yul du mi snang ba / lha'i drang srong lta bu lo ras las mi zhan pa zhig byed dgos / yang na sangs rgyas kyi bstan pa lugs gnyis kyi 'phrin las rgya chen pos 'dzin pa / chos rgyal 'phags pa lta bu zhig byed dgos gsungs /.

<sup>xvi</sup> The terms 'Brug-gzhung and 'Brug-yul had yet to be coined. Foreign travelers and some map-makers during this period were still applying the name 'Potente' to Tibet, and not to Bhutan, of which they were nearly unaware.

<sup>xvii</sup> On the career of 'Obs-mtsho-ba bsTan-'dzin 'Brug-rgyas, see Aris 1979: 244ff, and Ardussi 2000.

<sup>xviii</sup> lCags-ri, rTa-mgo and sPang-ri Zam-pa (earlier spelled dPang-ring Zam-pa).

<sup>xix</sup> Gtsang mKhan-chen was a prominent monk and accomplished painter at the gTsang-pa court, before having to flee Tibet. His younger brother was killed by Mongol soldiers supporting the 5<sup>th</sup>

Dalai Lama, and he considered the chaos in Tibet as a sign of the prophesied time for men of religion to flee to the border regions. In about 1645, after many harrowing experiences, he and his older brother found their way through the snowy passes into northern Bhutan. These events certainly influenced his thinking about the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama and the *Zhabs-drung*, whose biography was his last major writing before his death in 1684. His Collected Works once filled thirteen MS volumes (see the autobiography of gTsang mKhan-chen: *Bstan pa 'dzin pa'i skyes bu thams cad kyi nam par thar pa la gus shing rjes su 'jug pa'i rtogs brjod pha rol tu phyin pa dang gzungs dang ting nge 'dzin gyi sgo mang po rim par phye ba'i gtam, stod-cha*: 269.a-270.a, 280.a-b; *smad-cha*: 420.a-449.b).

<sup>xx</sup> LNDRR Nga: 8.b Lho rong lho sgo bas mthar bsti gnas tshol // de ltar byas na bod yul mi lo bdun // bsgom bsgrub byas las gnas der zhag bdun sgrub thag nye // (citing a gter-ma text called Gsang ba nor bu'i thig le'i rgyud.

<sup>xxi</sup> LNDRR Nga: 101.a-102.a

<sup>xxii</sup> LNDRR Nga: 111.b: *padma dkar po'i skye ba su yin pa de bsdad yong / ma yin pa de shi 'gro ltos shig ces dang /*. Dpag-bsam dBang-po's tutor and arch enemy of the *Zhabs-drung*, Lha-rtse-ba Ngag-dbang-bzang-po also died from psychic injury attributed to Ngag-dbang rNam-rgyal (LNDRR Ga: 122.a-123.a; Ca: 4.a; *Lho'i chos-'byung*: 19.b-20.a).

<sup>xxiii</sup> On the 'Phyongs-rgyas Sde-pa's murder see LNDRR Ga: 123.a (the date is given in the biography of Lha-rtse-ba, *Mnyam med lha rtse ba chen po'i nam par thar pa rab bsngags snyan pa'i sgra dbyangs brgya pa*: 37.a, where his death is attributed to illness, however). The smallpox at the court of Gtsang was ascribed by the Bhutanese to Ngag-dbang rNam-rgyal's black magic (LNDRR Nga: 29.b-31.a).

<sup>xxiv</sup> E.g. LNDRR Nga: 100.a-b. A similar line of reasoning was used by apologists for the kings of gTsang, to show that the karmic auspices for their rule had been arranged from the Dharma Realm by the deceased religious kings of early Tibet, for the welfare of sentient beings in 16<sup>th</sup> century Tibet (*Law Code of Karma bsTan-skyong dBang-po*: 15).

<sup>xxv</sup> *Baidūrya ser po*: 345-395. See also Ahmad 1970: 143ff. As this paper was being finalized, I received a copy of Kapstein 2000, with whose comment at p. 266 fn. 120 I wholly agree.

<sup>xxvi</sup> The continuity between the state of Sakya and that of Bhutan is argued by a number of Bhutanese writers (e.g. Rje Yon-tan mTha'-yas (*SDE-SRID* 13: 16.b-17.a) who treats Ngag dbang rNam-rgyal's government as a natural successor to those of Sakya and Phag-mo-

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gru). The theoretical foundation of Yellow Hat rule has been partly analyzed by Zahiruddin Ahmad ("The Historical Status of China in Tibet," *Journal of the Oriental Society of Australia* 9, pt. 1/2 [1972-73]: 99-107).

<sup>xxvii</sup> Petech claims that "Phags-pa as the political leader of Tibet was simply "invented" by [emperor] Khubilai because he was the religious chief who offered the best guarantees of intelligent subservience to the aims of the new ruler of China." (Petech 1983: 185).

<sup>xxviii</sup> David Farquhar (1978): 9-10.

<sup>xxix</sup> One of those was Blo-gros rGya-mtsho, the Lama of Me-rag, a Gelugpa branch monastery in eastern Bhutan since the days of dGe-'dun-grub (1391-1475). His expulsion by the *Zhabs-drung* was one of the chief causes for Gelugpa invasions of Bhutan before the founding in 1681 of a replacement monastery at Tawang, in Kameng.

<sup>xxx</sup> *LNDRR Nga*: 95.a-96.b. Chapters 19-21 of his biography are structured around the theme of his turning the ten wheels of the Tathāgata and of the Cakravartin king. The canonical source primarily cited is entitled *Sa'i-snying-po-'khor-lo-bcu pa'i-mdo* (Skt. *Daśacakra-ksitigarbha-sūtra*).

<sup>xxxi</sup> On the role of the *dpon-chen* at Sakya, see Petech 1983: 192ff; Petech 1990: 44. Another element of comparison between Sakya and Bhutan were the succession problems of their respective spiritual heads. The *Zhabs-drung*'s original intent to be succeeded by male heirs was frustrated by the dearth of suitable candidates, somewhat complicating the picture sketched here (see Aris 1979 and Ardussi 1999 for more details). In Sakya, the situation was just the opposite, with too many sons of the chief families competing for appointment as *Di Shi* (see Petech 1983: 192).

<sup>xxxii</sup> The most effective successor to combine both roles was the Fourth *sDe-srid* bsTan-'dzin Rab-rgyas (1638-1696), on whom see John Ardussi 1999.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Aris 1979: 244ff.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> The ancestors of two aristocratic Tibetan families were among those driven out, the Pha-lha and sKyid-sbug (the family of Pho-lha-nas's wife). These expulsions did not include the Nyingmapa, however. Contrary to Leo Rose (Rose 1985: 73, fn 1), the 'Brug-pa of Bhutan have always accommodated the powerful, local Nyingmapa establishment, both spiritually and as a key element of their political success.

<sup>xxxv</sup> *Mgon-po-dngos-grub-'byung-ba'i-rgyud*. In addition to the opposition from the governments of gTsang and Lhasa, internal sectarian rivals included primarily the Lha-pa (some-time followers of the Dalai Lama) the gNas-rnying-pa, the 'Ba'-ra-ba and the Lama

of Me-rag in eastern Bhutan. Independent testimony of this struggle is found in records of the 'Ba'-ra-ba monks, the autobiography of the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, works of *sDe-srid* Sangs-rgyas rGya-mtsho and those of the *Zhabs-drung*'s Tibetan 'Brug-pa rivals.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Leonard W.J. van der Kuijp, *Contributions to the Development of Tibetan Buddhist Epistemology*, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1983, p.103, 306: Sgra pa nga yin rtog ge pa nga smra ba ngan 'joms nga 'dra med // sdeb sbyor nga mkhas snyan ngag nga nyid mngon brjod 'chad la 'gran med pa // dus sbyor ngas shes phyi nang kun rig rnam dpyod blo gros mtshungs med pa // de 'dra gang yin sa skya pa ste mkhas pa gzhan dag gzugs brnyan yin // (the original work is entitled *Nga brgyad ma'i 'grel pa* from vol. 5 of the *Collected Works of the Great Masters of the Sa skya sect of Tibetan Buddhism*. Tokyo: The Toyo Bunko, 1968). My translation differs slightly from van der Kuijp's. The *Nga brgyad ma'i 'grel pa* may itself have been based on a kind of repartée style of poetry competition from early Tibetan society (see, for example, the "I Song" competition between king Khri Srong-lde-btsan and Padma Sambhava noted above (Nyang-ral Chos-'byung: 283, and another one at pp. 386ff).

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Translation by M. Aris 1979: 214; the original text is from LNDRR *Nga*: 31.a-b: lugs gnyis 'khor lo bsgyur ba nga // nga ni kun gyi skyabs su bzang // dpal ldan 'brug pa'i bstan 'dzin nga // nga ni 'brug par brdzus rnams bcom // rtsom pa'i dbyangs can grub pa nga // nga ni legs bshad 'byung khungs btsun // mtha' bral lta ba'i bdag po nga // nga ni lta log mkhan sun byin // rtsod pa'i mthu stobs bdag po nga // nga mdun mi 'dar brgol ba su // bdud dpung 'joms pa'i dpa' bo nga // nga nus bzlog pa'i mthu chen su // 'chad pa'i ngag gi dbang phyug nga // nga ni rig gnas kun la mkhas // gong ma'i lung bstan sprul pa nga // nga ni 'dra min sprul pa'i gshed //.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Law Code of Karma bsTan-skyong dBang-po: 15, 20.

<sup>xxxix</sup> LNDRR *Nga*: 119.a: de nas yang sems can gyi bde skyid sangs rgyas kyi bstan pa la rag las pa dang / sangs rgyas kyi bstan pa'ang 'jig rten gyi bde skyid la rag la / de phyir lugs gnyis kyi khrims / byang chub sems dpa'i spyod yul gyi thabs kyis yul rnam par 'phrul pa bstan pa'i mdo dang / 'khor lo bcu brda sprod pa chen po'i mdo las 'byung ba ltar legs par bca' ba mdzad de /. Cf also Petech 1990: 44 and the sources cited there for similar statements relative to Sakya. A similar formulation comes at the beginning of an old text on the legal and moral codes of Srong-btsan sGam-po: e ma sgron skal gnyis pa bzhin / gsar du shar ba'i du bzang por / mchod yon nyi zla zung gcig gi / bka' khrims stobs kyi 'khor los bsgyur / mnga' 'bangs dus bde'i dpal la spyod / skyid pa'i nyi ma dgung nas

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shar / 'di 'dra'i skal bzang mthong rnams skyid / sngon bsags bsod  
nams mthu las 'ongs / (Sngon byon chos rgyal srong btsan sgam  
pos mdzad pa'i khrims yig la ma phyir bgyis pa'i zhal lce bcu gsum,  
contained in Tshe-ring bDe-skyid 1987: 77).

<sup>xli</sup> Chos khrims dar gyi bdud pa 'jam la dam pa / rgyal khrims gser  
gyi gnya' shing lji[d] non che ba / (Law Code of Karma bsTan-skyong  
dBang-po: 24).

<sup>xlii</sup> Dmangs mi khyim gnam gyi skar ma lta bu grangs kyis mi chod  
pa rnams kyi gnya' ba rgyal khrims gser gyi gnya' shing btsan pos  
mnan../ (SDE-SRID 13: 36.a);

<sup>xliii</sup> *LNDRR Nga*: 119.a-b; *Lho'i chos 'byung*: 103.a-104.b; Uray 1972.  
On the Phag-mo-gru law code, see Dung-dkar Blo-bzang 'Phrin-las  
1982: 77).

<sup>xliiii</sup> The *Zhabs-drung* received high praise from gTsang Mkhan-chen  
for his suppression of banditry and other forms of civil disorder  
(*LNDRR Nga*: 146.a-b). The date of promulgation of Ngag-dbang  
rNam-rgyal's legal code is uncertain. *Lho'i chos 'byung*: 105.a-114.b  
contains the full Bhutanese code current c.1729 (now edited and  
translated by Michael Aris in *Sources on the History of Bhutan*,  
Vienna: 1988). The author of the *Law Code of Karma bsTan-skyong*  
*dBang-po*: 24 states that he had consulted a Bhutanese law code as  
one of the precedents for his study, which, if we accept as predating  
the events of 1642, confirms the existence of a Bhutanese code from  
that era.

<sup>xliv</sup> History of Sikkim: 37-40.

<sup>xlv</sup> The three Lamas were Lha-btsun Nam-mkha' 'Jigs-med (b.1597),  
whose biography has been printed in India, Kah-thog-pa Kun-tu-  
bzang-po, and Mnga'-bdag Phun-tshogs Rig-'dzin (b.1591), a prince  
of Guge (of whom a biography is said to exist).

<sup>xlvi</sup> This relationship is made explicitly clear in the History of Sikkim,  
where (in the Tibetan version) the Sikkim ruler is referred to by  
Tibetan authorities as *Sa-spyod*, implying a rank well below that of  
*Rgyal-po*, *Chos-rgyal*, or *Sde-pa*.